Emerging Practices to Combat Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): Visitation

COVID-19 Clinical Knowledge Transfer from Vizient members and industry resources
Updated: April 16, 2020

Vizient is committed to ongoing research of Vizient members’ emerging practices and other related updates to federal and regulatory guidelines in support of efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this document is to assist our members with critical information to supplement this work. As new information surfaces, updates will be provided.

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Practice trends

Vizient’s dynamic dashboard show that nearly all Vizient members have severely restricted in-person visitation. CMS has expanded recommendations to prevent the spread of the virus that includes information about visitation, specifically 1) the availability of adequate and lawful access to chaplains or clergy, 2) the use of technology to connect families, and 3) special consideration for patients with psychiatric or cognitive disabilities who are being discharged to home.

Because of the strict visitation policies, health care organizations are looking for ways to connect patients with their loved ones. Johns Hopkins Medicine lists instructions on how to use common technology (text, video chats, etc.) and links patients to their portal and other care management tools.
Regulatory updates

Waiving penalties for HIPAA violations

CMS noted the Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights is exercising enforcement discretion and waiving penalties for HIPAA violations against health care providers that serve patients in good faith through everyday communications technologies (e.g., FaceTime, Skype) for the public health emergency. The Policy and Regulatory Revisions in Response to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (interim final rule with comment period) was published on April 6, 2020. However, CMS clarifies the new flexibilities are applicable retroactively, beginning on March 1, 2020.

Added 4/9/2020

Obstetric patients in New York State

An executive order has been issued in New York that requires all hospitals, both public and private, to allow women to have a partner in the labor and delivery room. Previously, some New York City hospitals had banned partners or support persons for obstetric patients.

- New York-Presbyterian visitation policy update.
- Mount Sinai Health visitation policy update.
- New York Times article re: executive order reversing restrictions for obstetric patients.

Updated 4/2/2020

Visitation restrictions

Additional guidance from CMS

CMS expanded recommendations on infection control to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in all care settings. The updates related to visitation include:

- Special consideration should be given to patients with psychiatric or cognitive disabilities who are being discharged to home to ensure they are able to adhere to the COVID-19 discharge recommendations and fully comprehend the significance of the precautions or if they have a family member or significant other involved to assist with these restrictions.
- Facilities must ensure patients have adequate and lawful access to chaplains or clergy in conformance with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act.
- Facilities can implement measures to:
  - Increase communication with families (phone, social media, etc.).
  - Potentially offer a hotline with a recording that is updated at set times so families can stay current on the facility’s general status.
  - If appropriate, consider offering telephonic screening of recent travel and wellness prior to coming in for scheduled appointments. This may help limit the amount of visitor movement throughout the organization and congestion at entry points.

Added 4/16/2020
**Acute and ambulatory facilities**

Restrict visitation policies to persons accompanying minors or patients in end-of-life situations. To reduce facility-based transmission, no visitors should be allowed in rooms of Persons Under Investigation (PUIs) or COVID-19 positive patients.

The following visitors should not be allowed:

- Persons with a fever or other cold/flu-like symptoms.
- Minors under the age of 16.
- People over the age of 70 who have chronic conditions and may meet one of the exceptions below are strongly encouraged not to visit.

Common exceptions include*:

- Emergency department patients— one visitor (at least until stable).
- Surgery patients— one visitor (at least until stable).
- Obstetric patients— one partner or one birth support person.
- Nursery and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) patients— birth parent or support person.
- Patients who are at the end-of-life— up to two visitors.
- Patients with disruptive behavior, altered mental status or developmental delays— one family member or support person who is key to their care and safety.
- Minors under the age of 18— one parent or support.

*Visitor should remain the same for the course of admission; no rotating in/out.

*Updated 4/2/2020

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**Long-term care**

Long-term care facilities should apply more restrictive policies regarding visitation. The [CDC Guidelines for Long-term Care Facilities, Nursing Homes](https://www.cdc.gov) are as follows:

- Restrict all visitation except for certain compassionate care situations, such as end-of-life situations.
- Restrict all volunteers, including non-essential healthcare personnel (e.g., barbers).
- Cancel all group activities and communal dining.
- Implement active screening of residents and healthcare personnel for fever and respiratory symptoms.

*Added 3/23/2020*

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**Clearly communicate with patients and families**

Because of strict visitation policies, healthcare organizations need to find ways to connect patients with their loved ones. [Johns Hopkins Medicine](https://www.johns-hopkinsmedicine.org) lists instructions on how to use common technology (text, video chats, etc.) and links patients to their portal and other care management tools.

*Added 4/16/2020*
Re-Thinking Word Choice during this Pandemic provides some suggestions of language choices that reflect the realities of what we are living through while continuing to provide assurance, compassion and comfort.

*Added 4/9/2020*

Communicate restricted visitation policy clearly, using plain, patient/family-centered* language on facility website main page.

- Provide phone number for more information.
- Use live chat features available on websites.
- Communicate updated visitor policy to community members via public service announcements, social media, email, newsletters, etc.
- Place signage outside of all facility entrances.

*In keeping with patient/family-centered care principles, explain that although patient care depends greatly on engaging families to be part of the healing process, "routine" visitation must be suspended until the transmission of COVID-19 is no longer a threat. Use your Patient and Family Advisory Councils (PFACs) to help craft your message.

*Added 3/23/2020*

**Limit entry points**

Reduce access into facilities.

- Limit entryways into facility so visitors, staff, and vendors with deliveries can be screened.
- Suspend the use of community and conference spaces by the public.

*Added 3/23/2020*

**Screening**

Screen all visitors, staff and vendors before entrance. Ask screening questions such as:

- Have you had a fever, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, or a new cough in the last 14 days?
- Have you been in close proximity to someone who is currently sick with COVID-19 or any other respiratory illness within the past 14 days?
- Have you traveled internationally or to any U.S. cities with high levels of ongoing transmission of COVID-19 (mainland China, South Korea, Iran, Italy, New York City, Seattle, etc.) in the last 14 days?
- Conduct temperature checks where possible.

*Added 3/23/2020*

**Patient and Family Centered Care guidance**

*Planetree Perspectives: Family Presence and Visitation Guidelines during a Pandemic* includes the following goals:
• To responsibly maximize the therapeutic benefits of family presence while limiting the risk to patients, family caregivers and staff.

• To ensure restrictions to family presence are appropriate to the current situation, which is rapidly evolving and expected to continue changing over time.

• To minimize the unintended emotional trauma that could result from family separation during special circumstances, including hospitalization of a child, childbirth and end-of-life situations.

Added 4/2/2020

Guidance from the Institute for Patient and Family Centered Care encourages the use of patient and family advisors (PFAs) as essential partners in ensuring credible, understandable information is communicated to patients, families and communities. Coordinators of patient and family centered care programs along with their medical and staff liaisons are in a critical position to collaborate with PFAs who can help innovate and facilitate information sharing to improve quality and safety during this time of uncertainty.

Added 4/6/2020

The Beryl Institute COVID-19 resources includes a weekly community briefing regarding COVID-19 related efforts where participants are encouraged to connect and reflect their experience.

Added 4/6/2020

Additional resources

Sample visitation policies from:

• UW Medicine
• University of Kansas
• Ohio State Wexner Medical Center
• Ochsner Health

Additional emerging practices

Access resource documents on other topics.

• Emerging clinical practices and evidence
• Managing critical supplies
• Surge capacity
• Staff impact
• Testing